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Few Famous

Chinese Poems



Translated into

English by

Charles Budd.

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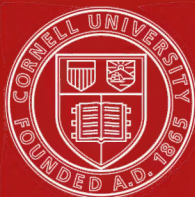
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A FEW
FAMOUS CHINESE POEMS

A FEW FAMOUS CHINESE POEMS

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH

BY

CHARLES BUDD



SHANGHAI :
KELLY & WALSH, LIMITED
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INTRODUCTORY.

The initiative of this little book was accidental. One day in June, feeling weary of commercial papers and Chinese account-books, I opened a volume of Chinese poetry that was lying on my desk and listlessly turned over the pages. As I was doing so my eye caught sight of the phrase, "Red rain of peach flowers fell." That would be refreshing, I said to myself, on such a day as this; and then I went on with my work again. But in the evening I returned to the book of Chinese poetry and made a free translation of the poem in which I had seen the metaphor quoted above. The translation seemed to me and some friends pleasantly readable; so in leisure hours I have translated a few more poems and ballads and these I now venture to publish in a small volume, thinking they may give the readers a little pleasure and also call forth criticism that will be useful in preparing a larger volume which I hope to publish hereafter; for it can hardly be said that hitherto the field of Chinese poetry has been widely explored by foreign students of the Chinese language.

Several of the translations in this booklet are nearly literal, excepting adaptations to meet the exigencies of rhyme and rhythm; but some are expanded to enable readers to understand what is implied as well as actually written in the original; for, after all, the chief aim of the translator of poetry should be to create around the mind of the reader the sensory atmosphere in which the mind of the poet moved when he wrote the poem. Whether I have attained even a measure of success in such a very difficult task can be decided only by the readers of these translations.

It should be borne in mind by students more or less familiar with the Chinese language that there are many versions of the stories and legends related in these poems, and these versions, again, have been variously interpreted by Chinese poets. A little reflection of this kind will often save a critic from stumbling into difficulties from which it is not easy to extricate himself.

A few notes are given at the end of the book to explain historical names, etc., but not many other notes are required as the poems explain themselves. Indeed, the truth of the saying "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin" has been impressed on my mind deeply by this little excursion into the field of Chinese poetry, for the thoughts and words of such poems as "The Journey Back," "The Inn-keeper's Wife," "The Poet-Beggar," etc., show us that human nature two or three thousand years ago differed not a whit from human nature as it is to-day.

CHARLES BUDD.

*Tung Wên Kwan Translation Office,
Shanghai, September 1st, 1911.*

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For all poetical faults and vagaries the translator must ask the indulgence of the readers, and the pardon of the shades of the departed Poets.

Pride and Humility¹

BY CHANG-KIU-LING

T'ang Dynasty (A.D. 618-906).

I'M but a sea-bird, wandering here alone,
And dare not call the ponds and lakes
my own ;

But what are those two lovely birds on high,
Shining resplendent 'gainst the morning sky ?

Upon the top bough of the San-Chu² tree,
Presumptuously they build that all may see ;
Their feathers than the iris lovelier far,
What if a missile should their beauty mar !

Such brilliant robes, which they with joy expose,
Might well excite the envy of their foes ;
And even the gods may view with dire disdain
The high ambition of the proud and vain.

Now I in quiet obscurity can roam

Far from my nest, flecked by the ocean's
foam ;

Yet, in a world where greed is always rife,

No one would raise a hand to take my life.



Dwellers in the Peach Stream Valley²

BY CHANG-HSÜEN

T'ing Dynasty

WHILE the master was wrapped in slumber
the fishing boat slipped its stake,
And drifted, and swirled, and drifted far over
the broadening lake,
Till islets, and mainland, and forests came into
view once more,
While the fisherman gazed and pondered the
lay of the new-found shore.
But ere long he espied an opening, shown by the
broken wave,
And in venturesome mood he steered his boat into
a narrow cave,
Where an azure mist obscured the scenes
through channels long and low,
As the current bore him gently into a world of
long ago.

In this old, flower-bestrewèd land, at first no
path the eye could tell,
For on the streams and on the banks the red
rain of peach flowers fell ;
Yet from the purple-shadowed mountains which
screened this favoured land
Flowed forth the Peach-Fount river along its
bed of silver sand ;
But, winding with the stream, the thickset peach-
tree groves with red-veined flowers
Hid the cooling waters flowing in and out the
shady bowers.
And here and there along the banks, set in
nooks of calm repose,
Were cottage homes of rustic work from which
the wreathed blue smoke arose ;
Showing that in this happy valley beyond the
world's dull roar,
Life went on as sweet and simple as in the
golden days of yore,
And the people of this valley in their ancient
garments clad
Were courteous in their manners and rejoiced
in all they had ;

While the dogs and fowls beside them
harmonised with all at hand,
And the mulberry tree and flax plant hid the
former barren land.
When the dwellers in this favoured region saw
the stranger guest,
They set before him food and wine and kindly
bade him rest ;
And when ~~true~~ ^{his} courtesy allowed they asked ^{of}
the things and men,
In the world of sin and sorrow far beyond their
quiet life's ken.
And when the time to leave them came, and
the stranger could not stay,
They led him through the cavern's channels
and saw him sail away.
In after life the fisherman often tried again,
but failed
To find the opening to the Valley through which
he once had sailed ;
But when the sand of life through the glass its
course had nearly run,
He thought he saw the way lay to it beyond
the westering sun.

The Five Sons

BY TAO-TSIEN

Tsin Dynasty (A.D. 265-419)

I AM wrinkled and gray,
And old before my day ;
For on five sons I look,
And not one loves a book.

Ah-Shu is sixteen years,
The sight of work he fears ;
He is the laziest lout,
You'd find the world throughout.

Ah-sien has tried in vain
A little wit to gain ;
He shirks the student's stool,
At grammar he's a fool !

Yong-twan is thirteen now,
And yet I do avow
He can't discriminate
The figures six and eight !⁴

Tong-tze is only nine,
But clearly does opine
That life, with all its cares,
Consists of nuts and pears.

Alas, that Fate so dour
On me her vials should pour ;
What can I do but dine,
And drown my woes in wine !



The Journey Back

BY A POET OF THE HAN DYNASTY

(B.C. 206 to A.D. 220) Name unknown.⁵

THE journey back has now begun,
The Chariot winds along the road—
The road which seems for aye to run
To me with my sad load !

How vast the wilderness around,
As o'er the endless track we pass ;
The only moving thing and sound—
The east wind through the grass !

The things I see are not the old,
As mile on mile the way is won,
And quick as these things change are told
Our years—and age comes on.

By nature's law each cycle brings

A time to flourish and decay,
And, with her perishable things,
We, too, must pass away.

No power have we with time to brave,
As iron and stone, the grave's stern claim,
One treasure only can we save—
An everlasting fame.



The Gallant Captain and the Inn-Keeper's wife

BY SIN YEN-NIEN

Han Dynasty (B.C. 206 to A.D. 220)

AMONG the near attendants of the
famous General Ho,⁶

The Champion of the Emperor Wu and terror
of his foe,

Was a gay and gilded youth of the name of
Fung Tze-tu,

Who loved to slay the fair sex as the general
did Hsiong-nu ;

Presuming on his master's fame he bantered
every girl,

And fancied he himself was great—he lived
in such a whirl.

The landlord of the wine-shop was scarcely a
man of means,

But had a young and pretty wife not yet out of
her teens ;

And with this charming lady Fung Tze-tu was
wont to flirt ;
But though so young and charming she was
very much alert.
One day in Spring this hostess fair, in gracious
serving mood,
Alone attended to the wants of guests for wine
and food.
Attired in flowing skirt, and girdled loose with
girlish wile,
Embroidered vest and wide-sleeved outer robe
of ancient style ;
Her slender head on either side with massive
tresses graced,
And crowned with Lan-tien⁷ jade, below with
Ta-tsin⁸ pearls enlaced :
This young and dainty figure, said the gallants
with a sigh,
Was a sight with which no other on this earth
could ever vie ;
And as they posed before her in their elegant
attire,
She deftly filled their glasses, and allowed them
to admire.

Just as this dainty hostess stood alone within
the inn,
Preparing special vintages selected from the bin,
Up rode a gay young officer with canopy of
rank,
Accompanied by attendants afoot on either
flank ;
His charger's handsome trappings richly bound
at every joint,
And silver-mounted saddle burnished to the
flashing point,—
Alighting from his horse there stood the son of
the Kin-Wu,⁹
The very gallant officer, the dashing Fung
Tze-tu.
He called for wine in tasselled jug, and carp
on golden plate,
And thought such lavish bravery the lady
would elate ;
Besides such show he offered her a mirror
burnished bright,
Together with a red silk skirt of gauzy texture
light ;

All these, he thought, must surely daze the eyes
of woman vain,
Who does not give her smiles for love, but for
the greatest gain :
Alas, within the lady's mind quite other
thoughts found vent,
More poignant when she spied within the red
silk skirt a rent.
The rent within the skirt, she mused, no pang
in you has wrought,
Nor would the loss of my good name cause
you a serious thought ;
For men soon tire of wives and seek their
joys in faces new,
But wives are true to their first spouse and
gallants do eschew ;
Among the lowly born, as in the camp or
Royal abode,
Are women who are true to death to honour's
stainless code :
I thank you for the favours shown, brave son
of the Kin-Wu,
But this time you have loved in vain, my
gallant Fung Tze-tu !

The Lady Chao-Chiun¹⁴

BY SIEU EO-YANG

Song Dynasty (A.D. 960-1278)

THE Court of Han which shone with
beauty rare

Of high-born women dowered with faces fair,
Had one within it, yet unknown to fame,
Of lowly fortune but of gentle name.

Now every flower had spared some hue or grace
To form Chao-Chiün's divinely lovely face ;
But courtiers' greed had barred the Palace gate,
Which Chao-Chiün's father would not try to
sate.

Nor could the maid herself her beauty flaunt,
And hold her fair name light for gold or taunt ;
Her Royal Master, therefore, did but jibe
At portraits of her, painted for a bribe.

And so this peerless girl was left alone,
Who might have shared Yüen's imperial
throne.

But Yen-Show's greed at last itself betrayed,
And charges grave against him were arrayed ;

Then traitor-like, as harried fox, or doe,
He fled the Court to help the Northern foe ;
And with true portraits of the lovely maid,
He fired the Tartar Chief his plans to aid.

Abetted by this courtier, wise and arch,
The Tartar armies crossed the Emperor's
march,
And devastated all the country near,
From which the people fled in piteous fear.

The Han King, conscious of his waning power,
Now sought for terms of peace in danger's
hour ;
And these were granted, if, with parlance brief,
The Lady Wang would wed the Tartar chief.

But ere the peerless maiden left her home,
To brave the mountains and the desert roam,
The Emperor saw her, and his heart stood still,
Yet basely feared to thwart the Tartar's will.

The silence passed, he raved in passion's whirl,
And slew the painter who had limned the girl ;
But useless were such puny acts, and cruel,
Which to a burning throne were added fuel.

For how could monarch, who perceived no more,
Of things which happened near his Palace door,
Expect to force the Hun to own his sway,
Encamped in strength a thousand miles away.

And so Chao-Chiün, beneath her weary load,
With royal guards began the endless road,
Watering with tears each lowly wayside flower,
The sport, alas, of beauty's fateful power.

Night on the Lake

BY PO TONG-SU

Song Dynasty (A.D. 960-1278)

THE breeze is sighing through the water
grass,

As up and down the narrow deck I pass ;
And through the rarest mist of Autumn night
The rain-moon floods the lake with pallid light.

The boatmen and the water-fowl sleep sound,
And in their dreams see other worlds around ;
The big fish startled sneak in haste away,
As flurried fox flees from the dawning day.

In depths of night it seems the human soul
Its sway o'er other things has lost control ;
I and my shadow play upon the strand
That marks the boundary of the silent land.

We watch the secret tides in noiseless work,
 Forming new isles where earthworms safely
 lurk ;
And on the moon—a monstrous pearl—we gaze,
 Looming through willow trees in silver haze.

Amidst our life of changing grief and woe,
 A glimpse of purer worlds will come and go,
As on this lake when nature's holy power
 Speaks to us in the dark and silent hour.

But hark, the cock crows ; rings the temple bell !
 And birds awake in mountain, plain and dell ;
The guardship beats its drum, the boats unmoor,
 While din and shouting on the hearer pour.

The Fishermen's Song

PRIZE POEM, BY CHENG-CHENG

T'ing Dynasty

THE sun is sinking in the west,
Bidding the fishermen think of rest.
“To-day,” they cry, “no need to search,
The people rush to buy our perch ;
Of shell fish, too, we are bereft,
We ’ve scarcely half a basket left !”
And at the piles of silver bright
They laugh, and shout, “Good wine to-night ;”
“We ’ll with the village wits combine
And drink our fill of “Luh-e ”¹¹ wine ;
Then if we feel inclined to roam,
The fisher-boys shall lead us home.”
So off they go to the evening meal,
And “Luh-e ” wine is drunk with zeal ;

And after draining every glass,
They doff the fishers' coat of grass,
And with wild shouts a net they seize
And rush out in the evening breeze,
Intent on catching the mirrored moon,
Bright in the sea as the sun at noon.
Tricked by the moon to their hearts' content,
Shoreward they move on music bent ;
The pipes of Pan, and flutes, come out,
Wine and music have a fine bout ;
Voices and instruments combined,
Soon leave no discord undefined !
After the shouting and the din,
Even fishermen had to turn in ;
So spreading their sails in a sandy cave,
And soothed by the sound of the lapping wave,
Tired and languorous the reveller yields
To sleep, and dreams of Elysium fields !

The Students' Ramble¹²

BY LU-TEH

T'ing Dynasty

NO longer could the blue-robed students
cling

To essay, or angle, or such like thing ;

The white-fleeced sky in depths of sapphire
blue,

The mother-earth, in Spring's bewitching hue,

Enticed them forth to ponder fresher lore,

And gather strength from nature's boundless
store.

So leaving college desk, and book, and file,

They tramp the green-robed country—mile on
mile ;

But resting oft within some shady nook,

By side of mountain rill or babbling brook.

The voice of streams, the sweet air after
showers
On new-mown grass, and earth, and fragrant
flowers ;
The depths of space, the everlasting hills ;
The unseen power that moves, and guides, and
stills
All animated nature's varied life
And law reveals where all seemed useless
strife—
Their sense enthralled, and coursing with their
blood
Through every vein in strong impetuous flood—
Divine and human, on this radiant day,
Seemed nearer kin than even when we pray
In marble temples to the unknown God,
Or wayside fanes, by common people trod.
But homeward now reluctantly they turn,
Yet incense still to nature would they burn ;
So as they wind through woods of pine trees tall,
By willow-bordered streams where catkins fall,
Their pent-up feelings, buried deep and long,
Find voice in classic chants from ancient song.

As chorus sweet, and solo clear and rare,
Are wafted softly on the evening air,
The water-fowl on village ponds and streams
Are gently wakened from their summer
dreams ;

While mingled with the scholars' choral lay
The songs of peasants speed the closing day ;
And bird, or insect,—each its anthem sings,
And little gift of praise to Heaven brings :
Then as the sun is sinking in the west,
And lighting up the regions of the blest,
From nature's altar falls the sacred fire,
And higher aims each student's heart inspire.



The Priest of T'ien Mountain

BY LI-TAI-PEH

T'ang Dynasty (A.D. 618 to 913).

I HEAR the distant baying of the hound
Amid the waters murmuring around ;
I see the peach flowers bearing crystal rain,
The sportive deer around the forest fane.

The waving tops of bamboo groves aspire
In fleeting change the summer clouds to tire,
While from the emerald peaks of many hills
The sparkling cascades fall in fairy rills.

Beneath the pines within this shady dell,
I list in vain to hear the noontide bell ;¹⁸
The temple's empty, and the priest has gone,
And I am left to mourn my grief alone.

Maidens by the River-Side

BY YUH-YONG

The Northern Wei Dynasty (A.D. 386-532).

MAIDENS robed in gauzy dresses,
- Heads adorned with lustrous tresses,
Nestling pearls in soft caresses,
Trip along the river-side.

Where the violet sweet reposes,
And the wild flowers group in posies,
Fairer than the queenly roses,
Through the flowers they conquering glide.

Where the cooling water ^{billow-}gushes,
^{willow-}Fitful shades of willow ~~bushes~~
Flee and hide among the rushes,
Lest the maidens should deride.

Tripping sylph-like, as the Graces,
East wind blowing on their faces,
~~Which it holds~~ in soft embraces,
And would ever there abide.



The Poet-Beggar

BY TAO-TSIEN

Tsin Dynasty (A.D. 265-419).

IMPELLED by hunger, forth I strode,
But whither causing little care,
While feeling life's oppressive load—
Too great for me to bear.

At last your village here I reached,
By tramping many weary miles,
And knocking at an unknown door,
You welcomed me with smiles.

And when I roughly asked for food,
Gave meat and wine my need to sate,
And in a kind and friendly mood
You chatted while I ate.

Now having shared your generous cheer,
And drained the oft refilled glass,
Revived and glad, unthanked I fear
To let such goodness pass.

A linen-bleacher, poor and old,
Fed Han-Sin,¹⁶ sprung of Royal breed,
From out her hard-earned scanty store
In time of darkest need.

Your kindly help to me this hour
Is fraught with equal love and grace,
Would I had Han-Sin's royal power,
Thy bounty to replace.

Alas, the fulness of my heart.
My tongue can only lamely tell,
So now in simple verse I write
Of kindness done so well.

And though at last the muffled drum
Will beat the end of earthly days,
Throughout the cycles yet to come
My verse shall speak your praise.

NOTES.

¹This translation is only a portion of a long poem.

²A mythical tree of the genii; but in the poem it may mean a very conspicuous tree.

³There are many versions of this legend both in poetry and prose. The introductory and closing lines of the translation are partly based on other versions of the story than that in the poem translated.

This poem and "The Fishermen's Song," and "The Students' Ramble," are taken from "A Selection of Poems," written by successful graduates at the Government Examinations during the present dynasty.

Many of these prize poems are cleverly and beautifully written, and they reveal considerable poetic talent, but not the power and genius found in the work of ancient Chinese poets.

⁴Implies that he is a thorough dunce.

⁵The poet's name is unknown, but he (or she?) lived during the Han Dynasty (B.C. 206 to A.D. 220), or earlier.

⁶General Ho K'ü-ping, died B.C. 117, Commander of the Armies of Han Wu Ti in several victorious campaigns against the Hsiung-nu.

⁷Lan-tien, a district in Shên-si, famous for its jade.

⁸Ta-tsin, the Roman Empire.

⁹A military officer of the Han Dynasty, holding a rank similar to that of Captain-General.

¹⁰Chao-chiün, or Wang Chao-Chiün, was a very beautiful girl who was precluded from entering the presence of the Emperor Yuan (Han Yuan Ti) by an avaricious courtier, Mao Yen-sheo, who bribed the court painter to present ugly portraits of Chao-Chiün to the Emperor, because her family would not pay the large sums of money he demanded. Afterwards Mao Yen-sheo's wiles became known to the Emperor, and he fled to the Khan of the Hsiung-nu to whom he showed a

true portrait of Chao-Chiün. Thereupon the Khan invaded China with a great army, and demanded the Lady Chao-Chiün as the price of peace. Afraid to refuse, the Chinese Emperor surrendered Chao-Chiün to the Tartar Chief who then retired beyond the Wall. According to a popular but untrustworthy version of this story, Chao-Chiün, when she reached the Heh-long Kiang (Amur River), jumped into the stream rather than cross the boundary which separated her from her native land.

¹¹“Luh-e,” the name of a famous wine.

¹²This is a free translation, yet nearly every word is implied in the original. A crudely literal translation would not reveal the thoughts aroused in the mind of a Chinese reader of the poem.

¹³The temple bell.

¹⁴Han-Sin was the grandson of a prince of Han, whose state was annexed by the founder of the T'sin Dynasty. In early life Han-Sin suffered great poverty, and for some time was befriended by a poor woman who bleached flax. Afterwards he became

the commander of the armies of Liu-Pang, the founder of the Han Dynasty, and regained his ancestral domain; he then sought out his friend, the flax-bleacher, and gave her 1,000 pieces of gold.



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